

# Tips for Preparing Parent Spokespersons

Parents can be powerful advocates for child abuse prevention by partnering with staff to educate the public, reach out to other parents in need of help and support, and shape policies and practices that impact families. When parents speak out through the media or at public presentations about the positive changes in their own lives, others gain valuable insights and are moved to take action to help themselves or their neighbors. Staff should offer tangible and emotional support during this process.

## **You may wish to ask the following questions of potential parent spokespersons to help them decide whether or not they are ready to share their stories:**

- \* Is this the right time for you to speak out? Are you prepared for the attention that may follow? Is your life fairly stable right now?
- \* How much (or how little) do you want your name, face, or voice to be used publicly?
- \* What do you most want to share in an interview or speech?
- \* How does your family feel about your interest in speaking publicly about your life experiences? Do your family members mind if you refer to them in your talk?
- \* What effect will your exposure have on you and your family members, especially your children?

## **If parents are ready to speak out, you may wish to offer them the following suggestions:**

- \* Remember to speak from your heart and from your own experience.
- \* Decide what you most want to say and then practice how you will say it. If you agree to an interview, have a friend, family member, or staff member ask sample questions so you can rehearse your responses.
- \* Anticipate difficult questions. It is always OK to say that you don't know the answer to a question or don't want to respond.
- \* Always assume that anything you say to a representative of the media is "on the record" and might be repeated in a story.
- \* Be aware that a media story or headline may be portrayed in a more dramatic way than you expect.
- \* Keep the focus on your own positive growth and change.
- \* Emphasize that "asking for help is a sign of strength."
- \* Choose your words carefully and avoid slang, unrelated remarks, and angry responses.
- \* Don't feel the need to volunteer information just to fill in uncomfortable silences.
- \* Make helpful suggestions to other parents in the audience and invite your listeners to take action that will help strengthen families and prevent child abuse.

Remember to thank parent spokespersons for sharing their experiences and to debrief and provide support to them after the event. By sharing their expertise and life experiences with others, parents are sharing a valuable gift and are helping to make their community a better place.